

A Gutter Would Be Spoon River

WRITE the *Spoon River Anthology* in long hand, leave out its subtlety and humor, change its simplicity to crudity, replace inspiration with determination, take from it, in other words, all of those intangible qualities which make it great instead of disgusting, and you will have Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, twenty-four episodes of small town life, some of which have appeared previously in the *Seven Arts*, the *Masses* and the *Little Review*. The scene is laid twenty years ago, at the "beginning of the most materialistic age in the history of the world, when wars would be fought without patriotism, when men would forget God and only pay attention to moral standards, when the will to power would replace the will to serve, and beauty would be well nigh forgotten in the terrible headlong rush of mankind toward the acquiring of possessions."

It is conceivable that men and women still exist who are unaware of the decadence of such towns as Winesburg at the end of the nineteenth century. They will be people who do not read. But it is more conceivable that a goodly number of those people who do read desire a summary of what they have read before along these lines—a sort of handy guide to all of the *Spoon Rivers*—wherein obscenity, insanity, vain pomp and hardness of heart are expatiated upon, and they can wallow in perversion and abnormality to their souls' content. These are the same people who, having seen a diseased organ under the X-ray, desire its photograph, or who, if they are so fortunate as to be relieved of a festering appendix, wish to bottle it. Let them have the book—and would that they might have read it in our stead! The only role in which the inhabitants of Winesburg could be endured is as voices from the tomb. Here they have not even the dignity of death to alleviate their nauseous acts.

We do not wish to seem at variance with the thing which Mr. Anderson has attempted. We are not at variance with anything when it is reduced to its simplest terms. Mr. Anderson has failed because he is not enough of an artist so far to cope in the way he chose with the tremendous task which he set himself. When this sort of thing is good it is very, very good, but when it is bad it is horrid. Mr. Anderson has reduced his material from human clay to plain dirt.

at least it would appear so to our eyes. It may be that our confidence was shaken at the start by his very bad English. Multitudinous subjects drag at a single predicate and words are described in which "an intense silence seems to lay over everything."

Let us not underrate a man who is obviously worthy of respect, if his book is not. We are still convinced that Mr. Anderson can write, and that he will eventually. A good proofreader could remedy his English and time will in all probability remedy his outlook.

WINESBURG, OHIO. BY SHERWOOD ANDERSON. B. W. Huebner. \$1.50.

"The Yellow Lord"

GREATLY admiring the method of Joseph Conrad, Mr. Will Levington Comfort applies one much like it to the telling of a tale of tropical island adventure. He does this with skill, and the result, in point of atmosphere, is all that he could wish. He develops the characters diffusely, as moods, always trying to have the reader feel them first, and visualize their doings incidentally. As the story itself, a good yarn, is superior to the characters, most of whom are commonplace and thin, the method seems unwisely chosen or pushed to an unwise extreme. One constantly feels the sensuous beauty of Magdalena Island, but Magdalena Island is rather a setting than a participant, and a reader is likely to find his head swimming with atmosphere as if with a low tropic fever, and to watch what goes on somewhat listlessly.

The Yellow Lord himself is a Chinese merchant prince, a tea planter, whose business has suffered from European corruption, so that the coolies are kept along on opium instead of wages. One of the Yellow Lord's employees, an American, incites the native islanders to revolt in order to find and have advantage of a sunken treasure he knows about. Another employee, an English officer, as well as we remember, is corroding from drink; his son is the nice juvenile of the piece, his beautiful daughter the heroine. The hero and narrator has answered an advertisement and stumbled into the situation just on the eve of trouble.

The best character of the lot is none of these, but Catten, a young English adventurer, the general and strategist of the Yellow Lord's defence. Catten is really interesting. Next after him, to our taste, is old Hoy Mon, the Yellow Lord's devoted viceroy. Mr. Comfort knows the Chinese, and will not take yellow liberties of the Fu-Manchurian kind for the sake of adding excitement to his tale. The Yellow Lord himself, a great, soft, secluded creature, subject to periodic homicidal fits and intended for a horrible monstrosity, like Lord Nairn in *The Voice in the Rice*, fails of impressiveness. He is a mere property, a mask; the best thing about him is that little use is made of him.

Chireen, the heroine, is a strain of music, but mighty saccharine music, to be sure. Bowditch, the hero and narrator, is—well, is principally Mr. Comfort's inappropriate though artistic method. The story, we repeat, is all right, and the one harsh thing to be said against the whole is that to write in this fashion and succeed requires a character interest far more profound. Chireen muses of the way to the Way, of always making the human divine, and there is talk about the human need of a Higher Hand reached down to us like the hand of a dog's master, but such mysticism is over the head of the novel.

THE YELLOW LORD. BY WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT. George H. Doran Company. \$1.50.

The June *Bookman's* list of fiction most in demand in April in the public libraries of the country:

1. *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.*
2. *The Desert of Wheat.*
3. *The Tin Soldier.*
4. *Joan and Peter.*
5. *"Shavings."*
6. *The Magnificent Ambersons.*

Non-fiction most in demand:

1. *The Education of Henry Adams.*
2. *"And They Thought We Wouldn't Fight."*
3. *The Seven Purposes.*
4. *A Minstrel in France.*
5. *Joyce Kilmer: Poems, Essays and Letters.*
6. *With the Help of God and a Few Marines.*

"Wives of the Prime Ministers, 1844-1906"

WIVES OF THE PRIME MINISTERS, 1844-1906, by Elizabeth Lee, with contributions by Mrs. C. F. G. Masterman, is one of those gossip, easy-going memoirs that suit one's idle mood. It is a pleasing mixture of diluted history (always in the background, however), scandal and small talk. It is often enlivened by extracts from unpublished diaries and letters.

The wives whose careers are sketched are Lady Caroline Lamb, whose affair with Byron is made the subject of a decidedly interesting chapter; Lady Peel, Lady John Russell, Lady Palmerston, Mrs. Disraeli, Mrs. Gladstone, Lady Salisbury and Lady Campbell-Bannerman.

Wives of the Prime Ministers is scarcely a safe guide to political and social climbers, but it is amusing, and often instructive. The author's purpose is mainly, however, to furnish the reader with personal anecdotes; there is no attempt at psychological analysis. Why should there be? That may well be left to maturer minds.

Mrs. Gladstone's unpublished Diary offers interesting data on the Queen and on Wellington. The following bit on Wellington is worth quoting:

"A few days ago at Peel's some one was placed by the Duke of Wellington, who gave an elaborate account of things relating to India. The Duke sat in his arm chair, his chin upon his chest, listening with occasional grunts. The man having gone on—on, the Duke suddenly came out in the quietest manner with, 'I've been in India.' Stanley told it very well."

The opening account in the book, *Lady Caroline Lamb*, is perhaps the most interesting from the viewpoint of literary and historical gossip. Byron figures in these pages as the hero (for a time)

of the good lady's career. The most striking episode recounted is the following lines:

"In the early days of their acquaintance Byron had made her promise not to waltz; but later on, at a ball given by Lady Heathcote, she said to Lady Caroline, 'Come, you must begin.' She replied bitterly, 'Oh, yes, I'm in a merry humor,' and whispered to Byron, who was standing by her, 'I conclude I may waltz now?' He answered sarcastically, 'With everybody in turn—you always did it better than any one. I shall have a pleasure in seeing you.' So she danced, and afterwards, feeling ill and fatigued, she entered a small inner room where supper was laid. Byron and some ladies happened to come in after Lady Caroline, and Byron said to her, 'I have been admiring your dexterity.' Infuriated by his manner, she took up a knife. Byron continued his untimely and unwise jesting, saying, 'Do, my dear; but if you mean to act a Roman's part, mind which way you strike with your knife; let it be at your own heart, not at mine, for you have struck there already.' She ran away, still clasp the knife, but without the slightest intention of injuring either herself or him. The ladies very naturally screamed and followed her, and in the struggle to get the knife away from her her hand got cut and the blood went over her gown. Of course, the rumor went about that she had tried to murder Byron and commit suicide."

A little later the author adds this naive touch: "And in spite of her strange behavior she was really fond of her husband, and if he had taken her in hand and brought discipline into her life it would have been better for her and for him."

A book, then, for idle hours; amusing enough, but not very much besides.

WIVES OF THE PRIME MINISTERS, 1844-1906. BY ELIZABETH LEE. E. P. Dutton & Co. \$5.



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